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THE STORY OF THE
HUGUENOTS

THE STORY OF THE *HUGUENOTS*

As contained in two addresses
made before the Huguenot Societies
of South Carolina and Pennsylvania

By

HENRY A. DU PONT



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P R E F A C E

AS the history of the French Huguenots from the Reformation to the Edict of Toleration in 1787 covers a period of some two centuries and a half, it is obvious that any detailed narrative of their vicissitudes and tribulations must of necessity be a long one. Although the literature of Huguenot history is quite extensive, much that has been written deals exclusively with special phases of the subject and it is not easy to find anywhere a concise epitome of the whole story.

I am republishing herein the address delivered before the South Carolina Huguenot Society in 1917, as well as that made before the Huguenot Society of Pennsylvania at Valley Forge on the 6th of May last, believing that the two addresses taken together, in spite of some unavoidable repetitions, will give in reasonably small compass a clear and definite résumé of the whole subject.

H. A. DU PONT

Winterthur, Delaware

July 30, 1920

ADDRESS Before the
Huguenot Society of South Carolina
At its ANNUAL MEETING
At Charleston, S. C.

April 13, 1917

A D D R E S S

MR. PRESIDENT AND FELLOW-MEMBERS of the *Huguenot Society of South Carolina*, Ladies and Gentlemen:

WHILE the "Transactions" of our Society give us the official details of its organization and subsequent progress, its inception and continuance must be ascribed, in the last analysis, to a certain innate sentiment which impels most of us to take an interest in all that concerns our forefathers, and this is especially the case when those whose names we bear, and whom we may be said to represent, were men of the piety, integrity, and high character of our Huguenot ancestors. Their entire history shows that they were not merely individuals of blameless lives and kindly dispositions, but that they were also men of special courage and capacity, who, far from believing in "peace at any price," were willing and able to fight for their religious rights as well

as well as to make any sacrifice of worldly advantage or of material things in order to attain them.

During the thirty-two years of the Wars of Religion, the Huguenots were valiant soldiers in the field; and though the changed conditions of a later era precluded an appeal to arms at the time of the Revocation, nearly two-thirds of them fled from their native country to escape persecution, in spite of the desperate efforts made to prevent their departure, while those who remained voluntarily exposed themselves to greatly increased suffering and oppression rather than abandon the land of their birth, and stubbornly resisted all attempts to compel them to forego their religious convictions.

Huguenot history may be divided into four periods, which will be discussed in succession: First. From the Reformation to the beginning of the Wars of Religion in 1562. Second. From 1562 to the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes in 1598. Third. From 1598 to the Revocation of this Edict in 1685. Fourth. From the Revocation to the promulgation of the Edict of Toleration in 1787.

The first period begins with the extraordinary

nary religious upheaval known as the Reformation, which was of slow and gradual development and extended over a considerable term of years. Originating in the early part of the sixteenth century, this great spiritual movement steadily progressed until its largest proportions were reached, in France at least, between 1555 and 1560. During the first years of the Reformation, those who severed their connection with the Roman Catholic Church were persecuted most cruelly; many were burned alive, hanged or beheaded, and many more brutally whipped in public or cast into prison. In spite of all these barbarities, the seceders from the established church became so numerous that the Catholics found it impossible to stem the tide, and, in defiance of the authorities, thousands of those who protested against the abuses which obtained in the Catholic Church held their religious exercises in the open air.) These "protestants," who were originally called "Calvinists" because they followed the teachings of Calvin, were not long in founding a national religious organization styled the "Reformed Churches of France," which was followed by the establishment

6 STORY OF THE HUGUENOTS

lishment of Protestant congregations all over the kingdom. The members of the Reformed Churches were better known, however, as "Huguenots," an appellation given them for the first time at Tours in 1560, its origin and significance still being involved in obscurity, although it has been a subject of discussion for more than three centuries.

Upon the death of Francis II, in December, 1560, the whole kingdom of France was convulsed by the doctrines of the Reformation, which gave rise to religious controversies of unbelievable violence, provoked the most vehement disputes, and engendered the bitterest animosities. Families were divided against themselves, parents and children, brothers and sisters, frequently taking opposite sides and often severing their personal relations. So intense was the nervous strain and so passionate were the feelings aroused, that bloodshed became inevitable, as the questions at issue could be settled only by an appeal to arms.

Early in 1562, the second period of French Huguenot history, that of the Wars of Religion, was ushered in by sanguinary encounters between Catholics and Protestants at

Amiens,

Amiens, Tours, and other places, the most serious being the affray, or massacre, as it is usually called, of Vassy, in which forty-nine were killed and some two hundred wounded, most of them Calvinists.

The Wars of Religion, once begun, dragged their slow length along with varying fortunes for some thirty-two years, including several truces or armistices during which hostilities were suspended. Any adequate account of that protracted contest would unduly lengthen this address, and no mention will be made even of its most important military episodes beyond a reference to the memorable siege of Rouen in 1562 and to that of La Rochelle in 1573 when the Catholics failed in their long-continued efforts to make themselves masters of that city. Rouen, however, was taken by assault after a desperate defence of many months in which the Huguenot women fought on the ramparts beside the men: the city was sacked and plundered and great numbers of Calvinists of all ages and both sexes put to the sword, among them two of my own ancestors.

We now come to the third period of Huguenot history, dating from the promulgation of the

of the famous Edict of Nantes, April 13, 1598, under the terms of which the Calvinists were guaranteed, among other things, religious toleration, the right of holding public office and of maintaining one church in the immediate vicinity of every town or city with the exception of Paris. (The beneficent effects of this measure were evidenced by the general religious tranquillity which prevailed throughout France during the latter part of Henry IV's reign as well as during that of his successor, Louis XIII, who issued his Edict of Nismes confirming in every particular that of Nantes.) Similar conditions prevailed during the first years of the sovereignty of Henry's grandson, Louis XIV, whose important "Déclaration" of May, 1652, acknowledged in no uncertain terms the services rendered by the Huguenots in the support of the Crown during the revolts and disturbances which had characterized his minority, and who had given, to quote his own words, "signal proofs of their affection and fidelity." The manifesto further declared that it was his will "that they be kept and maintained in the full enjoyment of the Edict of Nantes" and "notably of the public

public exercise of their religion despite any and all decisions or decrees to the contrary, either of our council or of the courts." The Huguenots, on their side, entertained feelings of unbounded gratitude to Henry IV, the first monarch of the House of Bourbon, as well as to his descendants, and their loyalty to the person of the sovereign which had largely originated during the Wars of Religion, was of a most extreme and passionate nature. These sentiments were inculcated by the Reformed Churches and fostered in every way by the Huguenot ministers, commonly called "pasteurs."

When, however, the many uprisings and insurrections set on foot by the Catholic subjects of Louis XIV had been crushed and the power of the Crown had become infinitely greater than had been the case for centuries, the services and active support of the Huguenots were no longer of importance. Taking advantage of these new conditions, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the religious orders, and the more bigoted portion of the laity, inaugurated a campaign for the abrogation of the Edict of Nantes. A general assembly

assembly of the Catholic episcopate and clergy was held every five years in Paris for the consideration and discussion of religious questions, and it was customary on these occasions to present an address to the monarch and to vote a handsome subsidy to the royal treasury, which the Church could well afford in view of its ownership of nearly one-third of the real estate of the kingdom. In addressing the sovereign, the assembly of 1655 made the following representations: "That while not demanding immediate abolition of religious liberty, because we do not believe that it would be easy to put this into effect, we would hope at least that the evil be not allowed to make the slightest progress, and, if the royal authority cannot cut it off at a single blow, that it will do its utmost to enfeeble and destroy it little by little." Although no official action was taken in response to the above demand, there can be no doubt but that private assurances were given: at all events, from that time forward the policy of the Government strictly conformed to the clerical programme just stated, and in furtherance thereof a long series of royal decrees and "Déclarations" gradually nullified

nullified and destroyed the religious and personal rights of the Huguenots, which had been guaranteed by Henry IV and his successors.

The limits of this narrative will only permit a brief statement of the more important of these measures of persecution. In direct contravention of the Edict of Nantes, all Protestants were declared ineligible for appointment to any public office, no matter how insignificant, were excluded from the bar as well as from the practice of medicine, and were not allowed to become booksellers or printers. If a Huguenot were seriously ill, it became the duty of a judge or other public official accompanied by two witnesses to intrude into the sick chamber to ascertain whether the sufferer desired the presence of the Catholic parish priest; when death ensued, funeral services were alone permitted during the very early morning hours or after dark at night, and not more than thirty relatives and friends could attend. Except within a church edifice, all meetings for prayer, for the reading of the Bible, or for any other religious purpose, were strictly prohibited under penalty of nine

of nine years' banishment from the locality in which the meeting was held, of corporal punishment, and of a fine of three thousand livres. Any Huguenot who had abjured his faith was prohibited from returning to the same under any pretext, this being deemed an act of "apostasy" and punished by banishment from the kingdom, confiscation of property, and public penance, which last penalty consisted of an exposure for hours to the jeers of the multitude in some prominent place, torch in hand and rope about the waist, the victim's sole attire being a scanty shirt.

So far as the Reformed Church was concerned, one of the first steps of the Government was to forbid any meetings of the National or Provincial Synods and Colloquies, although these bodies were recognized specifically by the Edict of Nantes: this was followed later by the practical abolition of the Consistories as well as by the confiscation of all Huguenot church property. The "pasteurs" of the Reformed Church, as may be supposed, were the subjects of special restriction: they were prohibited from making any reference to the Roman Catholic religion except in the

in the most respectful terms and from taking any other title than that of “Minister of the *Pretended Reformed Church*”; were not permitted to preach anywhere except in their own churches or “temples,” nor to make use of any clerical garment save an ordinary black coat, which was not to be worn *outside* of the house of worship. The “pasteurs” also were held responsible personally should any Catholic join the Huguenot Church or attend any of its services under pain of public penance, confiscation of property, life banishment, and the demolition of the sacred edifice, the extreme severities of these penalties being an indirect tribute, perhaps, to their powers of persuasion. Of all the measures of persecution, however, the worst was that of June 17, 1681, which authorized the “conversion” of any Huguenot child over seven years of age by forcibly taking it away from the parents and placing it in a Catholic institution, the family paying all the expenses: this decree contained the incredible statement that children of those tender ages were “competent to decide for themselves in regard to such an important matter as their salvation.”

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The emigration of Huguenots to foreign parts was the practical result of all these inequities: it began in 1656, soon after the new policy of the Government went into effect, and, although comparatively insignificant at first, became more and more appreciable as time went on. While every effort was made to prevent the departure of the Protestants, it is believed that about two hundred and fifty thousand Huguenots left France previous to the Revocation, the fugitives becoming much more numerous after the issuance of the abominable edict in regard to the kidnapping of children. As early as 1669 all French subjects were forbidden to leave the kingdom and take up their residence in foreign parts under penalty of death, confiscation of property, and permanent loss of nationality, the decree being general in its terms, as the Government was unwilling to admit that its measures of persecution were giving rise to an exodus of the Protestants. A later decree, which appeared in 1682, was more specific, as it referred to the Huguenots as "those in error who have been leaving the country in utter disregard of the salvation of their

their souls, of their true personal interests, and of the loyalty which they owe to their sovereign." This last manifesto changed the death penalty, so far as heads of families were concerned, to confinement in the galleys for life, and directed the imposition of heavy fines upon all those who assisted "those in error" to escape. A third decree issued a few months later nullified all transfers of real estate made by the persecuted Huguenots within a year previous to their flight, and openly stated that this was done "to prevent the departure to foreign countries of our subjects who belong to the *Pretended* Reformed religion."

The destruction of the religious liberty of the Huguenots having been achieved by the measures just mentioned, a formal announcement of the fact was not long delayed. On the 18th of October, 1685, Louis XIV affixed his signature to the Edict of Revocation, which declared null and void the Edict of Nantes as well as all subsequent confirmations of the same. Under the terms of this wicked and insensate measure, fraught with so much evil and disaster to the French nation, all Huguenot churches were demolished,

all

all religious meetings forbidden, all Protestant schools closed, and all ministers of the Reformed Church ordered to leave the country within a fortnight. The penalties for apostasy and for expatriation were re-confirmed, and it was specified that all Huguenot children were to be brought up as Catholics.

This calamitous document, which inaugurated the fourth and last period of Huguenot history, terminated with the absolutely false statement that “our subjects of the Pretended Reformed religion are permitted, until it shall please God to enlighten them, to reside in any and all parts of our kingdom, pursue their avocations and possess their property without being restrained or troubled on account of the said Pretended Reformed religion, upon the condition, now stated, that they do not take part in its services nor meet together for prayer or other religious purpose of any nature whatsoever.” Notwithstanding this assurance, no doubt intended to give the Government some standing in the eyes of Protestant Europe, troops were already under orders in many parts of France to participate in the forcible conversion of the Protestants.

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The method employed was very simple: the heads of the Huguenot families were called together and notified that unless acts of abjuration were signed within a brief period (in Rouen they were given only two hours), troops would be quartered in their homes. As at first no signatures could be had, the soldiers forced their way into the Huguenot domiciles and proceeded to take possession, everything being permitted save rape and murder: they were encouraged to waste provisions, destroy furniture, and appropriate personal belongings, as well as to insult, annoy, and even torture at will the unhappy inmates. Resistance meant imprisonment, confiscation of property, and permanent separation of parents and children by the confinement of the latter in Catholic institutions. So great were the horrors of this diabolical form of persecution and so acute the suffering involved, that practically all the members of the Reformed Church, including those who fled the country later, affixed their signatures to acts of abjuration.

The use of troops as just described, was called a “dragonnade,” because the first soldiers

diers so employed were dragoons (*dragons* in French), and in this connection it is appropriate to quote the words of a Catholic prelate, the saintly Fénélon, who remarked that "it would be as easy for the King, by this method, to convert his subjects to Mohammedanism as to Catholicism."

As an immediate result of the Revocation, a large majority of the Huguenots made frantic efforts to leave the country, which, however, was no easy matter, as the frontiers and seacoasts were closely watched. While great numbers died of the fatigue and exposure incident to their flight or were killed by the armed guards, and while still greater numbers were put in prison, the departing Protestants were in such multitudes that the immense majority could not be prevented from escaping, although many were compelled to undergo much privation and suffering.

It must not be supposed, however, that all of the Huguenots were of the same mind: hundreds of thousands of them refused at any cost either to abandon the land of their birth or to give up their Protestant faith. Although they had become nominal Catholics by virtue of their

of their abjuration under duress, and were styled by the authorities “Religionnaires,” or “New Catholics,” they never wavered for a moment and absolutely declined to perform any of the religious duties of the Catholic Church or to attend its services, but maintained their Protestant faith by family prayers and secret exhortations in the seclusion of their homes.

While the members of the Reformed Church who had emigrated were in full enjoyment of religious freedom as well as of the protection afforded them by the laws of the countries in which they had taken refuge, the Huguenots who remained in France were subjected to all the former methods of persecution as well as to new and cruel expedients expressly devised to still further harass them. I shall endeavor in a few words to give some idea of their deplorable situation, it being difficult in this enlightened age to fully realize the shocking conditions which then obtained.

If a Protestant child were taken to the Catholic church for baptism, the priest performed the ceremony and then entered in the records

records that the infant just christened was the “bastard son (or daughter) of — and his concubine,” which meant that the parents had been married by a Huguenot “pasteur” and not by a Catholic priest. Needless to say, after a few such experiences no Protestant child was presented for baptism in the Catholic churches, except, perhaps, in some of the larger cities where the clergy were less intolerant. If a Huguenot couple wished to marry, the priest would not officiate until they had made confession, taken the communion, and undergone a religious probation not required of Catholics, its length depending upon the will of the bishop and being prolonged sometimes for years. During fatal illness any ecclesiastic had full authority to force his way into the house and demand that the patient take the last sacraments of the Catholic Church, and if these were refused or the sufferer expressed his intention of dying in the faith of the Reformed Church, appeal could be made, as soon as life was extinct, to the revolting Edict of April 29, 1686, which decreed that “legal proceedings should be instituted against their corpses” and sentences pronounced
denying

denying them Christian burial, and directing that the lifeless body, in a state of nudity, should be exposed to the desecrations of the mob and then dragged on a sled to the place known as a “voirie” where dead animals and other offal were thrown. Even when there was no interference with the remains, the interment of Protestants was not permitted in any Catholic church or cemetery, and their burials took place at night in some unfrequented place with no other ceremony than the prayers of a few relatives or friends. Another novel form of persecution was the practical denial of medical attendance to the unhappy Protestants under the provisions of a “Déclaration” which forbade the physician or surgeon to make any further visits if at his second call he was not furnished with a certificate showing that the patient had made confession.

Perhaps the hardest thing, however, which the non-emigrating Huguenots had to endure, was the systematic abduction of their children under the provisions of the monstrous Edict of 1681, to which allusion has been made previously and which was enforced with much greater frequency after the Revocation. The homes

homes of the Huguenots were surrounded at night by policemen, often headed by priests, who deliberately broke into the houses and carried off the screaming children despite the tears and protestations of their parents. For more than two generations the evil spectre of a possible seizure of their offspring haunted every French Protestant household in which young children dwelt!

One of the most striking features of this epoch of Huguenot history was the admirable courage and devotion of many Huguenot ministers and lay preachers who, taking their lives in their hands, travelled in disguise throughout France and officiated at secret meetings held in woods, quarries, and out-of-the-way places. Although most of these brave ministers perished on the scaffold and many of the worshippers were seized and sent to the galleys for life, the movement went on and could not be suppressed.

As it was impossible for any self-respecting, conscientious French Protestant to marry or to have his children baptized in a legal way, these ceremonies were performed in secret (*au désert*) by their own ministers who attended

attended to the spiritual wants of the faithful; and as time went on more than a million of French Huguenots had no civil status under the laws of their country. In February, 1785, Lafayette wrote to Washington as follows: "The French Protestants are the victims of an intolerable despotism: although for the moment not openly persecuted, their marriages are not legal: their wills are null in the eyes of the law: their children are considered as bastards and their persons as subjects for the gallows." In October of the following year, the Baron de Breteuil, one of the ministers of Louis XVI and a Catholic by religion, made his celebrated report on the terrible condition of the Huguenots, in which he did not hesitate to say that the title alone of the last degree of Louis XIV, dated March 8, 1715, "was enough to make one shudder." Although his Prime Minister was a Catholic archbishop, Louis XVI, infinitely to his credit, issued his Edict of Toleration in November, 1787, in spite of the determined opposition of many influential court people and members of parliament, as well as of the whole Catholic hierarchy with a few honorable exceptions.

ception. Under the terms of this Edict, French Protestants were permitted to exercise freely any profession or trade, to contract legal marriages before the civil authorities, and to rehabilitate legally the secret matrimonial unions and baptisms of the past, to register the births of their children, and to enjoy the right of Christian burial in their own cemeteries and at such hours as they deemed proper. Thus Louis XVI, at a single blow, put an end to the vile and atrocious system under which the non-emigrating Huguenots and their descendants had been persecuted so bitterly and so unrelentingly for more than one hundred and one years. He also announced his intention of restoring the confiscated property and of extending other measures of relief, but the outbreak of the Revolution precluded further action.

While, as Lafayette said, the French Protestants were "the victims of an intolerable despotism," it cannot be too strongly emphasized that they never yielded, nor ever for one instant thought of yielding, and that from father to son for three generations they resisted religious persecution with undaunted spirit

spirit and inflexible determination, until at last the long, hard contest was decided in their favor. Where in the pages of history can we find a braver and more persistent resistance to oppression, or a people more strongly animated by the love of their country and the fear of their God? With this in mind, it is difficult to understand the action of the Huguenot Society of America in denying to the posterity of these heroic and long-suffering brother Huguenots admission to its membership. Under the constitution of that Society, as originally adopted in May, 1883, the representatives of French families, whose profession of Protestant faith was anterior to the Edict of Toleration, were eligible for membership; but when the constitution was amended, April 13, 1908, this provision was eliminated, thus excluding the descendants of the non-emigrating Huguenots who for more than a century had fought to the finish the great battle of religious freedom.¹

¹ Since the publication of this address, the above exclusion has been happily terminated by a further amendment to the constitution of the Huguenot Society of America, adopted on the 14th of April, 1919.

Let

Let me now call your attention to the spirit of toleration which was a special characteristic of our Huguenot ancestors. While most tenacious of their own religious views, they were willing always that others should have the same privilege, and these sentiments are plainly revealed in a letter, dated March 13, 1713, of a many-times removed great-uncle, Abraham du Pont, the first of my family in South Carolina. Should we not then—if for no other reason than as a tribute to those who have gone before us—strive to cultivate a spirit of broad liberality and forbearance in matters of religion?

Will you permit me to say, in conclusion, that Abraham du Pont, in the letter to which reference has just been made, was not very far wrong when he wrote as follows from his plantation in St. James Parish, Goose Creek, to his brother at Rouen: “*Nous apprenons qu'on ne vous laisse pas en repos et qu'on renouvelle de temps à autre quelque moyen de chagrin. Il faut avouer que cet esprit de persécution, si éloigné des véritables principes du christianisme, est semblable à son auteur qui n'est jamais en repos et ne saurait laisser les*

les hommes tranquilles. Le bon Dieu vous console et mette fin à nos maux et veuille pardonner à nos ennemis."

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ADDRESS Before the
Huguenot Society of Pennsylvania
At the MEETING
Held at Valley Forge, Pa.
May 6, 1920

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A D D R E S S

MR. PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS of the *Huguenot Society of Pennsylvania*, Ladies and Gentlemen:

AS we are met here under your auspices, the most fitting and appropriate theme for my address would seem to be a discussion of the history and character of those from whom your Society takes its name.

The French people who abandoned the Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation and their descendants were known as "Huguenots." While there is no mystery connected with their personality, the origin and meaning of the name they bore have been for centuries matters of endless dispute and are still undetermined. There is a very large diffusion of Huguenot blood in the United States — much greater, in fact, than is generally supposed. In the last half of the seventeenth century, at least six independent settlements of

Huguenots

Huguenots were made in this country from Massachusetts to South Carolina, and during the seven or eight generations which have come and gone since those days, the descendants of the original settlers have increased and multiplied to a marvellous extent. In addition to the emigration under direct Huguenot auspices, a great number of French Protestants came to New York with the Dutch settlers and to Pennsylvania with the refugees from the Palatinate. Many of these people, and particularly in the latter State, were Huguenots who had fled to Germany at the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and had again become refugees on account of the devastation of the Palatinate during the latter years of the long reign of Louis XIV.

In an essay on the "Distribution of Ability in the United States," Henry Cabot Lodge makes a statement which should be highly satisfactory to your Society. It is based on a very painstaking analysis of "Appleton's Cyclopædia of American Biography" and reads as follows: "Indeed, we find that people of French blood exceed absolutely, in the ability produced, all the other races represented except

except the English and Scotch-Irish, and show a percentage in proportion to their total original immigration much higher than that of any other race."

Among the posterity of the Huguenot emigrants are included no less than four Presidents of the United States, Tyler, Grant, Garfield, and Roosevelt, whose descent in the female line is respectively traced to the Huguenot families of Comtesse, De la Noix (Delano), Ballou, and De Veaux; three of the five Presidents of the Continental Congress, John Jay, Henry Laurens, and Elias Boudinot; several Associate Justices of our Supreme Court; numerous Senators and Representatives in Congress; many members of the Cabinet, ambassadors, ministers to foreign countries, and governors of the different states; two of our greatest generals, Sherman and Pershing; thousands of officers of the army, from Marion, Huger, and others of Revolutionary fame, down to our own times; and a very large number of naval commanders, many of high rank and achievement, including Decatur, Du Pont, Dewey, and Schley. To the long list of those who have gained distinction in the

in the public service are to be appended also the names of multitudes of Huguenot descendants in private life who have shed lustre upon the bar, the pulpit, and the medical profession, or whose learning and capacity have rendered them prominent in literary pursuits, in the education of youth, in scientific and commercial avocations as well as in the management and direction of our great industries and railways, not forgetting those who have largely contributed to the public welfare by the successful development of agriculture.

While a widespread interest in all that concerns our forefathers has led to the establishment in this country of several Huguenot societies which serve to nurture and keep alive the memories of the past, it is believed that their entire membership comprises but a small percentage of the great number of Americans of Huguenot descent. There are some, perhaps, whose interest in these societies consists largely in the natural satisfaction they take in tracing their lineage to a French Protestant forefather who freely sacrificed all his worldly prospects and possessions for the sake of his religious convictions. There are many, however,

ever, to whom genealogical details do not strongly appeal, but who would perhaps take a more active interest in the high character and noble lives of their Huguenot ancestors had they a better conception of the religious, political, and economic aspects of their history.

The landing of the Pilgrims, for instance, and the events which immediately succeeded it, constitute an interesting episode of the past, easily followed and not difficult to remember; but the story of the Huguenots, which covers nearly two and a half centuries, is much more complicated. Although it is by no means easy to fix in our minds a clear and compact idea of its main features, the task is simplified by taking into consideration the four general periods into which the subject is logically divisible, as was pointed out in my address before the South Carolina Huguenot Society some three years ago.

The first of these periods, extending from the Reformation to the beginning of the Wars of Religion, is part and parcel of the general history of that great religious upheaval which convulsed Europe and reached its apogee in France

France between 1555 and 1560. The next period is inextricably entwined with the military and political events of the Wars of Religion which began in 1562 and ended with the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes. The third extends from the issuance of that Edict in 1598 until its Revocation in 1685, and includes the sad story of broken faith and bitter persecution under the reign of Louis XIV, followed by the voluntary expatriation of a large majority of the members of the French Reformed Church. The last period begins with the Revocation and terminates in 1787 upon the promulgation by Louis XVI of his just and merciful Edict of Toleration.

A full and complete account of our Huguenot forefathers, even without going into any great detail, cannot be adequately or satisfactorily given within the limits of an ordinary discourse. After speaking of the founding and organization of their church and of some of their characteristics and ideals, this address will conclude with a brief mention of the fourth and last period of Huguenot history, and especially of the trials and tribulations of the half-million of French Protestants

tants who refused to abandon their native land at any cost, a subject which has not received a great deal of attention in this country.

The seceders from the Catholic Church were originally called “Calvinists” because they had accepted the teachings of Calvin; and it is obvious that from the very beginning they must have met in their respective localities for counsel, prayerful discussion, and doctrinal exercises. The first permanent religious unit, styled a “Consistory,” was organized at Paris in 1555, every member of the congregation having an equal voice in the selection of the pastor, elders, and deacons. As might have been expected, similar units were soon formed in other places, all of which were speedily drawn together in the interest of common defence as well as in that of uniformity of doctrine and church government.

The first “National Synod” of the Huguenots assembled in 1559: it prepared and issued a confession of faith, setting forth the religious doctrines of the “Reformed Churches of France” (this being the official title) and adopted a general plan of organization and of ecclesiastical discipline as given in Félice’s

“History

“History of the Protestants of France”: from which the following brief outline is taken.

The religious units known as “Consistories” formed the basis of the Huguenot church autonomy and were grouped into “Colloquies,” composed of ministers alone, these bodies having full powers of supervision and discipline together with the right of filling pastoral vacancies, subject to the veto power of a consistory in the event of the assignment of an uncongenial minister. It is to be observed that the size of the different colloquies was no doubt determined by geographical considerations, as the question of distances cut a very large figure in those days when journeys by land could only be made on foot or on horseback. The next higher organizations were the “Provincial Synods” with similar powers, which took in all the consistories and colloquies within each of the many provinces into which France was then divided, the membership being made up of one pastor and one elder for each consistory. Finally, the whole system was subordinated and governed by a “National Synod” consisting of two pastors and two elders selected

lected by each provincial synod from its own members.

The real authority, as is plain, was vested in the ministers, or “pasteurs” as they were commonly called, and although the religious structure at its inception depended upon the votes of the congregations which organized their own consistories, the prerogatives of the self-constituted electors seem to have ended then and there, all that remained being the veto power just mentioned. Félice suggests that the idea of the political equality of all French citizens was derived from the equality of the members of the Huguenot congregations, that being the principle upon which the Reformed Church was primarily organized; but this is perhaps somewhat far-fetched, as the electoral privilege, apparently, was only once exercised and then because the problem could not well be solved in any other way. Several writers, moreover, have not hesitated to ascribe the love of liberty which animated the emigrating Huguenots to the presumed democratic nature of their church. While it is entirely true that they were passionate lovers of liberty, this sentiment does not

not seem to have emanated from any religious source, but rather to have been engendered by the cruel oppression which had so long deprived them of almost every civil and personal right.

During the centuries which elapsed from the Reformation to the promulgation of the Edict of Toleration, no change whatever can be discerned in the fundamental characteristics of our Huguenot ancestors. Their piety and morality, their integrity and courage, their industry and thrift, their readiness to sacrifice all material things for the sake of principle, and their most persistent and determined spirit of opposition to every form of religious oppression, remained unaltered and unaffected. Some of their most cherished ideals, however, were necessarily modified or obliterated by the march of events, and chief among these were their passionate affection for the person of the sovereign and the fervid zeal with which they supported his authority.

Upon the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes by Henry IV in 1598, the Huguenots were intensely appreciative of the religious liberty which he accorded to them, and their gratitude

gratitude was evidenced by the most ardent and unbounded loyalty to that monarch and to the House of Bourbon of which he was the head—a sentiment which was strongly endorsed and encouraged by the Reformed Church. Their unflinching fidelity during the various insurrections in the reign of Louis XIII was fully recognized by that monarch, and throughout the troubles and disorders which ensued after the accession of his son, Louis XIV, under the regency of his mother, Anne of Austria, they vigorously supported the Crown and notably at the time of the great rebellion of the Fronde which was set on foot by his Catholic subjects.

The services of our Huguenot forefathers were publicly acknowledged by the Queen Regent as well as by Cardinal Mazarin, who, speaking presumably in his capacity of Prime Minister and not as a member of the Sacred College, always referred to them as his “good friends.” Nor was the young king lacking in professions of profuse gratitude, though these were destined to be soon forgotten. His “Déclaration” of May, 1652, set forth that inasmuch as his Protestant subjects, to his great satisfaction,

satisfaction, “had given signal proofs of their affection and fidelity,” it was his will “that they be kept and maintained in full enjoyment of the Edict of Nantes” and “notably of the public exercise of their religion despite any and all decisions or decrees to the contrary, either of our council or of the courts.”

As a sequel to the various troubles and insurrections of the minority of Louis XIV, the great nobles had been shorn of their power to foment disorder, and the authority of the Crown had become immeasurably greater than had been the case for many centuries. Under these new conditions, the direct military aid which the Government had always received from the Huguenots no longer counted, and the intangible assistance known as moral support went for nothing in the eyes of the despotic ruler who then controlled the destinies of France:

The General Assembly of the Catholic episcopate which met in 1655 made most pressing and insistent demands upon Louis XIV for the gradual abolition of the religious liberties of his Protestant subjects. Although no public announcement was made, private assurances

surances of his acquiescence were undoubtedly given, as a change of attitude on the part of the Government was plainly revealed during the ensuing year. Thenceforward a long series of edicts and “déclarations” began to nullify little by little the rights and privileges of the Huguenots as guaranteed in perpetuity by Henry IV and specifically confirmed by his son and grandson. Louis XIV seems to have had not the slightest hesitation in inaugurating this new policy, although it involved the open repudiation of his own public “Déclaration” of 1652 and the merciless and ever-increasing persecution of his Protestant subjects which for so many years preceded the promulgation of the Edict of Revocation.

Under the terms of this calamitous measure, the two hundred and forty-three Reformed churches still in existence were demolished, all meetings of Protestants for religious purposes were prohibited, all ministers of the Reformed Church (unless willing to abjure their faith) were ordered to quit the country within a fortnight, and all Protestant schools closed. It is to be noted that the document expressly stated that “our subjects of the

the Pretended Reformed religion are permitted, *until it shall please God to enlighten them*, to reside in any and all parts of our kingdom, pursue their avocations and possess their property without being restrained or troubled on account of the said Pretended Reformed religion, upon the condition, now stated, that they do not participate in its services nor meet together for prayer or other religious purpose of any nature whatsoever." This dishonest assurance was no doubt intended to give the French Government a standing with the Protestant Powers of Europe as well as to conceal for the moment the prearranged plan of *enlightening* his "subjects of the Pretended Reformed Church" by means of the "dragonnade"—one of the most cruel and malignant forms of religious persecution which human wickedness had ever devised.

It consisted of quartering troops in the homes of the unhappy Protestants who declined to abjure their faith, the soldiers being not only authorized but directly encouraged to commit every excess short of rape and murder. With oaths and imprecations, they strode

strode as masters into the Huguenot domiciles, abused the men, insulted the women, appropriated silverware, rings, jewels, and everything of pecuniary value: moreover, not content with eating and drinking of the best that the house afforded, they compelled their outraged victims to purchase for their consumption all attainable delicacies. The military "guests" next proceeded to supply themselves with cash by selling the domestic animals, furniture, and movable property in general, after which they turned their attention to the persons of their hosts, often going so far as to force their abjurations by depriving them of sleep, burning their feet in the fire, or perpetrating other atrocities. Can we be surprised that the pious Fénélon, then a simple Catholic ecclesiastic, but later Archbishop of Cambrai, having occasion to refer to the dragonnade, could not help saying that by such proceedings it would be as easy to convert a people to the religion of Mahomet as to make them Catholics!

While the immediate result of the Revocation was to stimulate emigration to an unparalleled extent, about half a million French

French Huguenots stood their ground and refused to leave their homes at any cost. Although compelled by military violence to affix their signatures to perfunctory abjurations and in consequence officially known as "New Catholics" or "Religionnaires," they absolutely refused to recognize *any of the religious obligations of the Catholic Church or attend its services*, but maintained their Protestant faith by family prayers and exhortations in the privacy of their homes, as well as by meetings for devotional purposes held by stealth in secluded places.

During the very year which followed the Revocation, the so-called "New Catholics" began to hold clandestine meetings for Protestant worship; and whenever a banished "pasteur," braving the perils of the scaffold, came back in disguise, they courageously gathered around him. In spite of the cruel persecution which had been their lot for so many years; in spite of the destruction of their churches, the banishment of their ministers and the annihilation of their religious liberties; in spite of the forcible abduction of their children and of the brutalities of the *dragonnade*

dragonnade — which has been touched upon in some detail so as to give an idea of their enormity—the “Religionnaires” or non-emigrating Huguenots persistently refused to abate in the smallest degree their long-cherished dogma of individual fealty to the sovereign!

Wonderful as it may seem, the spirit of intense loyalty to the person of “our King,” as they called him, was still in full existence, and the secret religious meetings which the persecuted Huguenots held in caves, woods, and other hiding-places, invariably concluded with a prayer for the King and for every member of the royal family—a fact as touching as it was amazing in view of the unrelenting persecution from which they had so long suffered. The principle of heredity and the innate respect accorded to the ideals and emotions which animated their forefathers, no less than the Christian duty of forgiving their enemies, may perhaps explain the abiding fidelity of the non-emigrating Huguenots to the person of their sovereign; but how can we account for the astounding political idiocy of a monarch who deliberately used every effort

effort to trample under foot and destroy that ultra-loyal spirit of personal allegiance which several millions of his most faithful and capable subjects had for generations so freely and unreservedly extended to him and his dynasty?

As late as the 20th of August, 1719 (four years after the death of Louis XIV and *thirty-four* years after the Revocation), the banished “pasteur,” Jacques Basnage, formerly a minister of the Reformed Church at Rouen and still very influential in Normandy, addressed a pastoral letter to his Huguenot brethren in France exhorting them to hold fast to the faith and be *loyal to the King!* The ingrained sentiment of personal devotion to the head of the House of Bourbon still lingered even during the year immediately preceding the French Revolution, and the long-cherished Huguenot ideal was only finally shattered and destroyed by that supreme political convulsion.

Let me now say something about the fourth and last period of Huguenot history, extending from the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 to the issuance of the Edict of Toleration in 1787, a period of more than one

one hundred and one years. As already stated, the first result of the Revocation was to increase emigration to an unparalleled extent, as the vast majority of the Huguenots were determined to avoid further persecution by seeking a refuge in foreign lands. The one thought of the Government, however, was to prevent this exodus, and the intendants were ordered to redouble their vigilance, while edicts and “déclarations,” intended to augment the difficulties of escape, came thick and fast from Paris. Thousands of departing Protestants died of exhaustion, cold, or hunger; were lost at sea, or were killed by the guards and patrols which swarmed along the coasts and frontiers. Thousands more were seized and cast into the different prisons which were packed to their utmost capacity—the men, as fast as they could be tried, being sentenced to the galleys for life, and the women to have their heads shaved and be permanently confined in convents. Notwithstanding all these barbarities, the authorities found it impossible to check the mighty impulse of expatriation, and multitudes succeeded in getting safely out of the country in spite of all efforts to detain

to detain them. The fugitives, who carried with them very large sums of money, included the vast majority of the bankers, manufacturers, and great merchants of the kingdom, as well as most of its highly skilled artisans and tradespeople. Although the Government was able to seize and sequester the real estate of those who fled, it could not prevent enormous monetary transfers to foreign ports, the large financial interests of the country as well as its commercial and industrial affairs being to a very great extent under Huguenot control.

Another equally ruinous result of the Edict of Revocation was the almost entire destruction of French industry and the total disappearance of several lines of production. More than two-thirds of the workshops and factories of the kingdom were closed by reason of the flight of the proprietors and their employees: in Rouen and its vicinity, the economic consequences of the Revocation were specially disastrous and the population was diminished by twenty thousand souls. Not only were the manufactures of the country practically destroyed, but foreign competition was prodigiously

giously increased, as the fugitive Huguenots largely created and maintained the industrial prosperity of rival powers.

It was not long before the financial and economic conditions of the kingdom became desperate and the whole country was reduced to misery by an act of abominable tyranny which not only set at naught the basic principles of Christianity in the pretended interests of religion, but outraged the most elementary conceptions of wise statesmanship—a measure insisted upon by the dignitaries of the Catholic Church and mainly brought about by the persistent efforts of the King's Jesuit confessor, Père La Chaise, whom Fénelon described as “a man of coarse and narrow mind, distrustful of solid virtue, but appreciative of those of relaxed moral principles, who kept the King in complete ignorance, like a blind man leading the blind.”

Upon the death of Louis XIV, the Duke of Orleans became Regent of France. As he was indifferent to matters of religion, the “New Catholics” hoped for some alleviation of their miseries; and, although the dread of possible trouble made him averse to any change

change in the ecclesiastical laws, he ordered the release from the galleys of a number of Protestants and did not interfere with those who desired to leave the country. Notwithstanding his comparative leniency, the abjuring Huguenots were everywhere harassed and persecuted by the intendants, who were supreme in the various provinces. In this they were aided and abetted by the priests, who, paradoxical as it may seem, were particularly incensed because the very people who had been forced by military violence to make perfunctory renunciation of their own faith, continued to ignore the obligations of a religion to which they were absolutely opposed.

Upon the decease of the Duke of Orleans in December, 1723, his powers devolved upon the Duke of Bourbon, with the title of Prime Minister, who hastened to restore to the Catholic Church the political ascendancy which it formerly possessed. Although there had been no change whatever in religious conditions since the death of Louis XIV, the new Government, with the usual fatuity of ecclesiastical régimes, decided to treat the Huguenots with increased severity. This was by no means

means an easy task, as human ingenuity had exhausted itself in devising additional methods by which the long-suffering Protestants could be persistently harassed; and, when a new "Déclaration," dealing with them, was issued May 14, 1724, in the name of Louis XV, a boy of thirteen, it proved to be nothing more than a recapitulation of every cruel and vindictive measure then in force, aggravated by much heavier punishments for all offences. For once, however, clerical intolerance had overshot the mark: the merciless and wholly unnecessary increase of penalties, already too severe, was more than the courts of parliament could stand, and the "Déclaration" was pronounced impracticable so far as the imposition of sentences was concerned, with the result that matters went on pretty much as before.

It is easy to see that the lot of the half-million or more adherents of the Reformed Church who remained in France was infinitely harder than that of their brethren who had fled the country and were in full enjoyment of religious freedom. No self-respecting Protestant could have his offspring baptized in the French Catholic churches, as their names were

were entered in the registers as "bastards" or "natural children" because the parents had not been married by Catholic rites; nor could he contract a legal marriage without first making confession to a priest and taking the communion, the result being that the nuptial celebrations of the Huguenots as well as their baptisms were relegated to their clandestine meetings and were nullities in the eyes of the law. The right of burial was also denied if the last sacraments of the Catholic Church had not been accepted, and for many years the Huguenot dead were interred by stealth in fields, gardens, or even in cellars, the only ceremony being the hurried prayers of those who laid the remains to rest. Moreover, the kidnapping of children for the purpose of immuring them in convents and bringing them up as Catholics, though inaugurated in previous years, was greatly increased in frequency, and for more than two generations no Protestant household in which young children dwelt was ever free from the horrible dread of their forcible abduction.

We have seen that after the Revocation the Huguenots throughout France lost no time in holding

in holding “assemblées au désert,” as they styled their secret religious gatherings in un-frequented places, and this practice was kept up for a great many years, the services being conducted by lay preachers or exhorters in the absence of a pastor. As the years passed, however, nearly all of the banished ministers, who visited France in disguise to attend to the spiritual needs of the faithful, had perished on the scaffold or were undergoing life sentences in prison, which was an important factor in making the resistance of the Huguenots less effective.

They had not lost heart, but had failed to perceive the necessity of proper organization, and about 1730, Antoine Court, then a Protestant lay preacher in the south of France, but later one of the most prominent divines of the Reformed Church, undertook to remedy the situation. He saw clearly that the Huguenots in the various provinces must keep in touch with one another and no longer lean upon their brethren in other countries, that they must depend upon themselves, must quietly reorganize their “consistories” and recruit their “pasteurs” from their own numbers.

numbers. As his recommendations were universally approved, the members of the Reformed Church began almost everywhere to reconstitute their consistories under the supervision of lay preachers, to send young men to Lausanne in Switzerland to prepare for the ministry, and to hold more frequent “assemblées au désert.” In brief, the Huguenot forces were entirely reorganized, were better fitted to continue their brave resistance, and were animated by new hope and determination.

This realignment of the Protestant “personnel” coincided with a growing change of public opinion in France, and as early as 1754 one of the greatest men of that age and generation, the broad-minded, sagacious, and far-seeing Turgot, had not hesitated to advocate the entire separation of Church and State. The impossible nature, from an administrative and judicial standpoint, of the religious conditions then existing had long been realized also by most of the French statesmen and magistrates, as well as by the members of the legal profession in general. Then, too, very many just and fair-minded Catholics began to deplore an intolerance which had completely

pletely abrogated the natural rights of their Huguenot compatriots, then numbering more than a million souls by virtue of the normal increase of population, and despite the opposition of the Catholic clergy this feeling grew and made itself felt throughout the whole land. Moreover, the French officers, with Lafayette at their head, who had fought in the American Revolution, were no mean factors in this change of sentiment, as their ideas had become broader and more liberal by reason of their services in the New World.

In February, 1785, Lafayette wrote to Washington that: "The French Protestants are the victims of an intolerable despotism: although for the moment not openly persecuted, their future depends upon the caprices of the King, of the Queen, of the parliaments, or of the ministers of state: their marriages are not legal; their wills are null in the eyes of the law; their children are considered as bastards and their persons as subjects for the gallows." Under date of September 1, 1785, Washington replied that his best wishes attended all the objects which Lafayette had in view, but advised him to proceed cautiously as the

as the surest means of securing ultimate success. In October of the following year a memorial of the terrible condition of the Protestants was submitted to Louis XVI by his Minister and Secretary of State, the Baron de Breteuil. Although he was a Catholic by religion, nothing could have been clearer, fairer, or more emphatic than this famous report, which discussed the whole question in great detail and demonstrated beyond dispute the urgent necessity for appropriate action.

At the last session of the Assembly of Notables, in the spring of 1787, Lafayette offered a resolution in the second "bureau" of that body setting forth that "a portion of our fellow-citizens who do not profess Catholicism find themselves condemned to a sort of civil annihilation," and requesting His Majesty to put an end to this state of perpetual proscription, "equally opposed to the interests of his people as a whole and to the industrial development of the nation, as well as to every principle of morality and sound policy." A few days later, Lafayette wrote as follows to the eminent American, John Jay, of New York :

York: "On the final day of our session, I had the honor of offering a resolution, which was adopted almost unanimously, in regard to our French Protestants. It was presented to the King by the Comte d'Artois, our President, and graciously received. I was generously supported by a prelate of learning and virtue [La Luzerne, Catholic Bishop of Langres], who spoke admirably in support of my resolution, to which the bureau added various complimentary phrases in regard to the Roman faith." On the 15th of August following, Washington wrote to Lafayette: "I ardently trust that you may succeed in your efforts to secure tolerance in matters of religion. Not having myself a bigoted attachment to any form of worship, I am in favor of allowing all good Christians to take the road to Heaven which seems to them to be the most direct, the most simple, the easiest, and the one least liable to religious controversies."

The Edict of Toleration was signed by Louis XVI in November, 1787, and submitted to the Parliament of Paris on the 19th of that month, its registration by that body practically giving it the force of law, as the
provincial

provincial parliaments could always be depended upon to follow the lead of Paris. Most persistent and determined efforts were made to prevent the registration of the Edict, but Louis XVI could not be moved. He said to the three presidents of the Parliament whom he had summoned to Versailles: "I propose to repeal the penal laws against the Protestants, which are offensive to justice and humanity." The court ladies busied themselves in making personal appeals to each and every member of the Parliament, while the ecclesiastics made their protests directly to the sovereign, who stood alone, not having the support of his Prime Minister, Loménie de Brienne, Archbishop of Toulouse. In marked contrast to the broad-minded Christian spirit which had animated the Bishop of Langres when he supported Lafayette in the Assembly of Notables, the Archbishop of Paris, accompanied by fifteen Catholic bishops, demanded an audience and made an earnest plea for delay. Their efforts were in vain; the reply of Louis XVI to all of their representations being: "It is my will that the Edict be registered."

Under

Under the terms of the Edict of Toleration, the French Protestants were granted the right to exercise any profession or trade, free from any interference on religious grounds, to contract legal marriages before the civil authorities, to rehabilitate legally the secret matrimonial alliances and baptisms of the past, to register the births of their children, and, finally, to enjoy the rights of Christian burial in their own cemeteries and at such hours as they deemed proper. In brief, every right and privilege of French citizenship from which the Huguenots had been so long debarred, were freely and unreservedly restored to them and an end was put, once and for all, to the unjust discriminations from which they had so cruelly suffered in the past. More than this, Louis XVI announced his intention of restoring their sequestered property and of extending such other measures of relief as might be found desirable, but the outbreak of the French Revolution precluded further action. The Edict of Toleration, it is true, did not formally recognize the Reformed Church as a religious entity in France, an omission which was probably judicious in view of the conditions then existing,

isting, and at all events was in complete accord with the ideas of Washington, who, as we have seen, had counselled Lafayette to proceed with prudence, the precise language used being: "Remember, my dear friend, that it is a principle of the military art to reconnoitre and feel your way before advancing too far."

Thus at one blow the whole contemptible fabric of hate and outrage so studiously built up under the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XV was swept away. The grandchildren of the persecuted Huguenots, who had refused at all costs to abandon their homes and firesides, emerged victorious from the long-fought contest which for three generations had been carried on with unsurpassed fortitude and resolution. (Is there anything recorded in the pages of history which excels the persistent and unflinching stand of the non-emigrating Huguenots? And where in the annals of the past can we find a braver and more determined resistance to oppression, or a people more strongly animated by the love of their country and the fear of their God?)

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